Twitter Thread by Alun Williams



Alun Williams
@AlunMW

Since "at 22" is trending and I coincidentally changed my profile picture to this on facebook yesterday, here I am at 22 back in 1984 and in my final year at university. 1/14



Earlier in the year I'd dyed my hair pink and yellow as a rag week stunt, and then all pink so as it wasn't quite so crazy. In a way, dying my hair like this may have helped determine the course of my whole subsequent life. 2/14

A few weeks later, with the hair dye still very much showing, I landed a job at a small software company based in a farmhouse near #Peterborough. I turned down an interview for a job with a big company, Ferranti, because I'd become aware of its links to the defence industry. 3/14

My mother thought I was making a big mistake, passing up the chance to work for a famous and long-established blue-chip company, and choosing a company that would probably go under quickly. 4/14

The software company often struggled. Sometimes when we got our pay cheques we were asked not to pay them in just yet, until those who were married and had kids had got their pay cheques cleared, in case some of the cheques bounced. 5/14

But the company survived, and some software I had designed and written became a key component of its product. 6/14

By the early 1990s the company had grown and moved into an office in Huntingdon. Meanwhile Ferranti was in big trouble after taking over a profitable US defence company, whose profits turned out to come from clandestine arms deals. 7/14

By 1993 Ferranti was bankrupt, but I was still working for the software company, helped through the early 90s recession by venture capital, which meant I could still pay the mortgage on the house I'd bought in Peterborough. 8/14

Periodically the company structure or name would change for one reason or another, but somehow my job survived, and my software ended up being used in countries around the world, giving me lots of opportunities to travel. 9/14

Though the original company is now long gone, the software I wrote is still in use, and helps me make a living, even though it's no longer a big part of my day to day life. I'm still living in the same house in Peterborough, now happily married. 10/14

I didn't explain the part the hair dye played in all this. It was probably some time in the mid 90s when I found out. I'm not sure when or where, but over a beer, maybe abroad on a business trip, and definitely from my boss, the founder of the farmhouse software business. 11/14

He told me that he'd given me the job at least partly because he thought my dyed hair would mean nobody else would give me a chance, so maybe he should. He also told me that at first he thought he might have made a mistake. 12/14

It had taken a couple of years for me really to find my feet as a programmer. But it turned out that it was my software that had helped to keep the company afloat and get the venture capitalists interested. 13/14

So really that hair dye didn't just change my life, but his too, and, in a smaller way perhaps, the lives of everyone else who worked for the company, and the software developers in other companies who used our software. No wonder I like chaos theory. ■14/14